

South Street Seaport Museum,
206 Front Street (Matthew Howell Building)
New York
New York County
New York

HABS No. NY-5677

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM
206 FRONT STREET
(Matthew Howell Building)

HABS No. NY-5677

Location: 206 Front Street,
Between Fulton Street and Beekman Street,
New York, New York County, New York.

Present Owner: New York City. Lessee: South Street Seaport Museum.

Present Occupants: East New York and Inwood Fish Co. and Pozzo Seafood.

Present Use: Fish Market.

Significance: Built as a Federal style store and residence for the grocer Matthew Howell in 1798 or 1799, 206 Front Street is one of the oldest buildings in the Seaport. The Howells occupied the building until 1882 when they moved their shop, then a military and gunpowder store, to 205 Front Street. Today, 206 Front Street is part of the South Street Seaport Museum, a group of galleries, stores and piers standing in close proximity to high-rise office buildings in Lower Manhattan.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Shortly before 206 Front Street was built for Matthew Howell in 1798 or 1799, the Common Council of the City of New York agreed to "regulate" (or grade) Front Street from Burling Slip to Peck Slip; by that date Block 96W, originally under water, was filled in. The erection date of 206 Front Street was determined by studying tax records, which are no longer available. According to an 1802 tax record listed in Ward 3, (later Ward 2), 202 Front Street (renumbered as 206 Front Street in 1829) was assessed as a house and lot to Matthew Howell for \$4,500 (real estate) and \$500 (personal). This assessment was relatively high, indicating that the original building is the same substantial brick store and residence that stands today.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Water lots #5 and #6 were granted to John and Mary Cannon in 1750. When filled, the property was designated Block 96W, lot 7. Today, lot 7 is included in lot 5. Information for the following chain of the title comes from New York City Conveyance Records, Surrogate's Court.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Grantor</u>	<u>Grantee</u>
Recorded June 4, 1823 Indenture made May 1, 1763 Liber, 168, page 151	Lawrence and Hannah Kortright	John and LeGrand Cannon Lots 6, 7, 8, 20, 21, 22
Before 1776 Liber & page unknown and unavailable	John and LeGrand Cannon	Jeremiah Brower
Date unknown Liber & page unknown and unavailable	Jeremiah Brower	Matthew Howell
April 5, 1825 Liber 186, page 414	Matthew Howell, merchant	Charles Howell, merchant (Price: \$1 + love + affection)
April 23, 1881 Liber 1588, page 227	Charles J. Howell, Jr.	Mary M. Howell (\$5,000 for 4 properties including 206 Front)
May 23, 1882 Liber 1671, page 38	Mary M. Howell (Child & Heir of Charles J. Howell)	Thomas J. Falls. (\$2 for 1/7 part of 206 Front)
May 23, 1882 Liber 1671, page 40	Henry T. Howell William P. Howell Lydia G. Howell Matthew Howell Julia Howell Mary M. Howell Charles J. Howell	Thomas J. Falls (\$1 for the rest of 206 Front)
May 23, 1882 Liber 1671, page 44	John H. & Agnes Howell Marla Adelaide and Horace B. Fisher	Thomas J. Falls (\$1 for 2/7 of property)
May 23, 1882 Liber 1671, page 46	Andrew S. Hammersley, Jr. (Referee) William P. Howell, et al defendants	Thomas J. Falls (lawsuit between Henry F. Howell, plaintiff and William F. Howell, et al defendants. Property sold at auction for \$2,000.)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Grantor</u>	<u>Grantee</u>
June 16, 1882 Liber 1674, page 19	Lydia G. Howell, wife of William P. Howell Julia Howell, wife of Matthew Howell Andrew S. Hammersley (Referee)	
June 16, 1882 Liber 1674 pages 20, 21	Agnes Howell, wife of John H. Howell Horace B. husband of Adelaide Fisher <u>Release</u>	
May 8, 1883 Liber 1723, page 292	Thomas J. Falls	Thomas F. Stevenson
June 17, 1907 Liber 112, page 71	Thomas J. and Caroline E. Falls	Hunter and Trimm Co.
August 2, 1913 Liber 147, page 04	Hunter and Trim Co.	Julian A. Benjamin
August 4, 1913 Liber 143	Julian A. Benjamin	Henry A. Trimm Peter Quinn William A. Hunter Hunter & Trim Corp. (lease)
July 25, 1917 Liber 3023, page 250	Julian A. Benjamin	William A. Stick
July 25, 1917 Liber 3029, page 33	William A. Stick	Etagloc Holding Co,
July 1, 1926 Liber 3559, page 89	Etagloc Holding Co.	Howard A. Raymond
July 1, 1926 Liber 3509, page 87	Howard A. Raymond	Michael G. Ginnane
July 14, 1948 Liber 4580, page 252	May V. and Agnes Ginnane Catherine G. Gaydoz Ruth MacRudoe Ruth Ginnane Phyllis A. McDermott truly Ginnane Katherine C. Ginnane	206 Front Street Corp.
April 11, 1968 Liber 294, page 15	Wall Street Realty Corp.	Delegate Realty Corp.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Grantor</u>	<u>Grantee</u>
July 7, 1969 Book 145, page 941	Delegate Realty Corp.	Seaport Holdings, Inc.
June 20, 1973 Book 282, page 705	Seaport Holdings, Inc.	City of New York (Lots 1, 5, 8)
June 20, 1973 Book 282, page 814	City of New York	South Street Seaport Museum (99 year lease- lots 1, 5, 8)
June 27, 1973 Book 283	City of New York	Chase Manhattan Bank (Not lotted: Air rights transfer)

4. Original plans and construction: In an article in the New York Gazette and Commercial Advertiser, January 25, 1821, Matthew Howell's military store and dwelling was mentioned as being materially damaged by fire. Therefore, it is uncertain whether the facade of 206 Front Street appearing in a ca. 1855 lithograph is the original design of Howell's building. At the time the view was taken, 206 Front Street was a handsome Federal style building with separate entrances to shop and residences and two dormers standing on a pitched roof.
5. Alterations and additions: The first recorded alteration of 206 Front Street took place in 1880 after a fire. By comparing a photograph of the new Howell store at 205 Front Street (ca. 1883) which shows a glimpse of 206 Front Street on the right, to a lithograph (ca. 1855) of the old Howell store at 206 Front Street, it is evident that the roof had been flattened, the dormers removed, the windows, with nine panes each and brownstone lintels, changed to six-over-six sash windows, and the small paned storefront window substituted with a large paned show window. According to the alteration application the front wall was rebuilt under the direction of architect, J.H. Euler. In addition, the document indicates that a small addition had been added to the building sometime before 1880; an 1857 Perris Insurance Map shows the addition already there.

In 1898, a building alteration application states that a one-story extension, probably replacing the existing one, was added in back, "22 feet deep with flat roof/tar and gravel" to be occupied by a fish market. In addition, the architects, Wells, Gardner and builders, Watson and Otis, for the fee of \$900, took out the partition throughout the main building and replaced the first floor with Kosmocrete. As part of the 1901 alteration to 207 Front Street next door, two openings were cut in the south wall (6' x 7') of 206 Front Street and one opening was cut on the second floor (3' x 7'), connecting the buildings. In 1931, a marquise of steel beams and corrugated iron was added to the facade, but this has since been removed.

In 1974, architects Eleyer, Blinder, Belle, filed an altered building application for the entire block. All buildings are to be combined with a central core facility as part of the South Street Seaport Museum's program for restoration.

B. Historical Context:

Even before the building existed, the lot was connected with prominent New Yorkers of the 18th century. While still under water, water lots 5 and 6 were granted to John and Mary Cannon, members of a very old and numerous family. The Cannons were related to the Huguenot Kortrights by marriage; Lawrence Kortright, who subsequently sold the property in 1763 back to the Cannons, was the second son of Cornelius Kortright who founded that family by marrying Helen Cannon in 1730. Lawrence Kortright was one of the original incorporators of the Chamber of Commerce in 1770. His granddaughter married Alexander Hamilton. Among the Cannons were the prominent merchant brothers in the 18th century, John and LeGrand.

Matthew Howell, a grocer, was the first owner and occupant of 206 Front Street. In 1814, Howell changed his business from a grocery to a military store. The Howells remained as businessmen, selling guns and gunpowder throughout the 19th century. They were probably the first New York firm to deal in the gunpowder produced by Eleuthere du Pont's powder mill in Wilmington, Delaware. In 1882, the Howells moved their business next door, to 205 Front Street, in which Daniel Field ran a boarding house from 1838 to 1840.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Built as a Federal style store and residence for the grocer Matthew Howell in 1798 or 1799, 206 Front Street is one of the oldest buildings in the South Street Seaport.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 21'-7" x 68'-6"; three-bay front; rectangular shape; three stories.
2. Foundations: Unknown.
3. Walls: Brick.
4. Structural system, framing: Masonry bearing walls with timber joists.
5. Chimneys: Two chimneys located along the south wall extend from the first floor to the roof. No evidence of fire box.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Center bay, first floor- Modern retractable garage door. North bay, first floor- Single leaf glazed door with top light.
 - b. Windows: South bay, first floor- 2/2 sash. Second and third floors- 1/1 wood sash with lintels and sills. Third floor window shorter than second floor windows.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Shed roof slopes up toward rear. Roof hatch in center of roof; built-up roll roofing.
 - b. Cornice: Brick and metal cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

First floor- Fillet work area with small office in southeast corner and freezer and cooler in rear; stairwell along north wall.

Second floor- Offices and stairwell along north wall.

Third floor- Storage area with hatchway to roof.

2. Stairways: Stairs leading from first to third floors are located along north wall. Access to roof hatch is by ladder.

3. Flooring:

First floor- Concrete.

Second floor- Vinyl and wood flooring.

Third floor- Wood.

4. Wall and ceiling finish:

Walls: First floor- Plaster with scored block pattern; Second floor- Plaster and paneling; Third floor- Plastered.

Ceiling: First floor- Metal; Second floor- Metal; Third floor- Plaster.

5. Doorways and doors: Four-panel, mortise-and-tenon-doors in third floor.

6. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating: No evidence of a fire box is visible on any of the three floors.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: 206 Front Street is part of the South Street Seaport Museum, a group of stores, galleries and piers, standing in close proximity to high-rise office buildings in lower Manhattan.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

A ca. 1855 colored lithographic view of 206 Front Street from the files of the Museum of the City of New York. Also appearing in Rosebrock, Walking Around South Street, p. 50.

A ca. 1883 photograph of 205 Front Street shows a glimpse of 206 Front Street from the files of the Museum of the City of New York. Also appears in Rosebrock, Walking Around South Street, p. 51.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

New York City Department of Buildings, Municipal Building and Val Wenzel files, South Street Seaport Museum: Alterations Applications #886 (1880); #261 (1898) plans available; #1309 (1901); #2178 (1931); #1734 (1974).

New York City Conveyances, Surrogate's Court.

Insurance Maps of the City of New York, 1852-1976, New York Historical Society.

New York City Tax Records, Municipal Archives, 23 Park Row, 1808-1965 and Landmarks Preservation Commission: 1802, 1807.

Taylor-Roberts Plan of New York, 1797; New York Public Library.
Also appears in Rosebrock, Walking Around South Street, p. 9.

Water Lot Grants Map, Val Wenzel File, South Street Seaport Museum.

New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission: Roberts, Lee and Steinke, Nancy, "Inventory of Structures in the Brooklyn Bridge S.E. Urban Renewal Area," New York, 1968, pp. 7-8.

2. Secondary and published sources:

A.T. Goodrich, Pub. The Picture of New York and Stranger's Guide to the Commercial Metropolis of the United States, New York, 1828, p. 460.

Rosebrock, Ellen. Walking Around South Street. New York: South Street Seaport Museum, 1974, pp. 49-51.

Scoville, Joseph A. alias Barrett, W. The Old Merchants of New York: New York, Carleton Press, 1862, pp. 20, 25, 35, 36.

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(architectural information)

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The South Street Seaport project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, with the co-operation of the South Street Seaport Museum, Inc. Recording was carried out during the summer of 1976 by Frederick W. Wiedenmann (HABS Washington D.C. office) project supervisor; Lori Zabar (Columbia University), project historian; Robert Lee Wiltse (Louisiana State University), architect; and student architects- Barry Lee Gill (North Dakota State University), Joe E. Price (Texas Tech University), and John R. Temmink (University of Virginia). Susan McCown, a HABS historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data in 1983, for transmittal to the Library of Congress. Walter Smalling, Jr. of the National Park Service took the photographs of the South Street Seaport structures.